



Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea

Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet

Shaker Portrayal April 26 at Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea

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BEREA, Ky. – On Sunday, April 26, actor Janet Scott, of Lexington, will portray Mary Settles, “The Last Shaker at Pleasant Hill” at the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea. The performance will be at 2 p.m. and is free and open to the public.

Born in Louisville on Oct. 21, 1835, Mary Settles survived a broken marriage, religious persecution, war on her doorstep and economic decline with the support of her Shaker family and her devotion to God. Mary’s mother died soon after she was born, and she was raised by her father. Interested in learning from an early age, she attended public school and became a teacher. She married Frank Settles in 1854, with their first son, Edward, born in 1855.

Frank Settles learned of settlers homesteading in Missouri and began planning to take a growing family west. After the difficult birth of her second child, Mary was told she could have no further children. This fact didn’t fit into Frank Settles’ plans, and he packed and moved his family to Pleasant Hill, where the members of the Shaker community welcomed them. Frank then announced that only Mary and the children were staying – declaring that Mary was now a widow – and proceeded to head west with all their possessions and money.



Devastated by this betrayal and abandonment, Mary was taken in by the Shakers and soon began working alongside her new family. Adopting Shaker beliefs of equality for women, simple living, celibacy and communal living – she soon developed a happy life as a member of the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearance at Pleasant Hill.

Mary Settles soon began to teach and for 27 years educated the young women at Pleasant Hill. When the Civil War came to the Shakers’ doorstep, they did their best to feed hungry soldiers and tend to the wounded from both sides. Remaining neutral, the Shakers took medical supplies to the battlefield, witnessing the horrors of battle.

After the war, the Shakers at Pleasant Hill continued their way of life, buying more land and building new buildings. They welcomed new members as many orphaned children were brought to them. But the Civil War took its toll, and the Shaker community at Pleasant Hill was never the same. On Sept. 18, 1910, the last 11 surviving members of the community, including Mary Settles, deeded the land to George Bohon in return for him caring for them the remainder of their lives.

Mary was the last surviving Pleasant Hill Shaker, and she died at age 87 in the Center Family House on March 29, 1923. She is buried in the cemetery at Pleasant Hill.

Scott, who will portray Settles, is the co-founder of Lexington's theatre group On the Verge. She served as director of a senior citizens' acting workshop for the Osher Life Long Living Institute at the University of Kentucky, and was the recipient of the Arts Educator of the Year Award from the Kentucky Chapter of the National Society of Arts and Letters. A graduate of Columbia University, Scott taught professional acting in New York City for 30 years.

This free performance and portrayal of "Mary Settles: The Last Shaker at Pleasant Hill" will be held Sunday, April 26, beginning at 2 p.m. in the private dining room of the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea. As a part of the Kentucky Humanities Council's Chautauqua Series, this program is funded in part by both the Kentucky Humanities Council Inc. and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea is located at 200 Artisan Way, just off Interstate 75 at Berea Exit 77. The center's exhibits, shopping and travel information areas are open daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and the cafe is open from 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Admission is free.

The Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea is an agency in the Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.